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SUBJECT: JORDAN: JANUARY 7 MEDIA REACTION TO GAZA SITUATION

11. SUMMARY: King Abdullah's diplomatic efforts competed for space against grisly photos from Gaza in today's Jordanian media coverage of the conflict. The King's dark warning of "a conspiracy against the Palestinian people" and his meeting with moderate Islamist cleric Yusef Qardawi topped coverage of local events. Editorials and op-ed commentary expressed dismay at the general position of Arab governments. END SUMMARY.

12. Opposite grisly photographs of dead and bloodied children, and beneath banner headlines decrying the killing of 42 civilians at the UNRWA-sponsored Al-Fakhora School in Jabaliya refugee camp, King Abdullah reclaimed a share of the coverage on Gaza published Wednesday in Jordan. Warning darkly of "a conspiracy against the Palestinian people and their future and right to establish an independent state," he told the pan-Arab satellite channel Al-Jazeera that he is "working in cooperation with Arab states and western countries to stop the aggression on Gaza immediately." His exclusive remarks to Al-Jazeera were published in large point lettering on the front pages of all major newspapers.

13. Local news reports stated that King Abdullah conducted a series of meetings on the Gaza conflict, topped by his consultations with a delegation headed by moderate Islamist cleric Yousef Qardawi. The King also met with an EU Troika delegation on opening a humanitarian corridor into Gaza, as well as with delegations from the Arab Interim Parliament, from the Lutheran World Federation, and with Quartet envoy Tony Blair. He reiterated throughout that Israel must end "its aggression on Gaza" immediately, that the international community must make intensive efforts to alleviate the political and humanitarian repercussions of Israel's offensive, and that the international community must pursue direct negotiations towards a two-state solution and the establishment of a "sovereign and viable" Palestinian state. Prime Minister Dahabi's public remarks tracked those of the King.

14. Relying on wire service accounts, all major dailies covered international diplomatic efforts, including French President Sarkozy's proposal for a temporary ceasefire. Al-Arab Al-Yawm newspaper reported that Israel told Sarkozy that it prefers U.S. - Egyptian mediation to a ceasefire. The newspaper also reported that the Arab League accused the U.S. of obstructing its efforts in the UN Security Council by supporting the Israeli position.

15. All dailies carried inside-page reports on the continuous public demonstrations against Israel's actions and in solidarity with the Palestinian people of Gaza. Reports appeared on several protests in various parts of the Kingdom, including a large-scale sit-in before the EU mission in Amman's Abdoun district last night. Security sources were cited as stating that over the past ten days, there have been 393 public activities in connection with Israel's military offensive in Gaza.

16. Editorial Commentary

-- "What Is the Arab Official Regime Waiting For?"

Columnist Jihad Al-Mheisen in the January 7 edition of the independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad asks, "Is Israel alone responsible for exterminating the unarmed Palestinian people, or does the world

also bear the moral, legal and military responsibility for what is happening there? How are we going to act, as Arab leaders and people, vis-à-vis this Palestinian bloodshed...? All this is happening and the Arab regimes continue to pin their hope on the role of the United States and the Security Council to stop the Israeli aggressions. Meanwhile, the Palestinian bloodshed by the Israeli war machine continues and escalates. Is this not enough to make a move to stop what is happening in Gaza? Do we wait for all the people of Gaza to be killed in order to stand by them?"

-- "Sarkozy's Vitality and the Arab Turtle"

Chief editor Taher Odwan in today's edition of the independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm observes, "This French-European movement in the field and at the highest levels indicates a political vitality that is completely absent from the official Arab arena, as if they are living in a different world where there is no war or massacres.... We must not belittle Sarkozy's words about the need for a quick solution to stop the war, and we are appalled and amazed at the official Arab stance."

-- " Hamas' Options"

Columnist and political science professor Mohammad Al-Momani in today's Al-Ghad comments, "In view of the atrocity that is happening -- and while we emphasize that Israel and its occupation are first and foremost responsible for what is happening -- we feel that the human suffering of Gazans is not a priority for the political decision-makers of Hamas, but rather a political tool that Hamas wants to employ to achieve political goals.... Hamas has committed a series of political mistakes against itself and against the Palestinian national project. Hamas' mistakes cannot be justified

AMMAN 00000051 002 OF 002

by the democracy that brought it to power or by Fatah's provocations or by the corruption of the Authority. All these claims are nothing compared to Hamas' action that eats away at the core of the future of the two-state solution. By going back to resistance, Hamas is more in harmony with itself ... but its choices, under the current situation, are not many, and they need political courage and strategic vision which we do not think Hamas has.... Hamas was wrong to think that its coup in Gaza would be accommodated or that it is capable of presenting itself as a replacement for the Authority or that any country in the region would accept it."

BEECROFT